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ABSTRACT

The New Christian Right (NCR) has long wanted to impose fundamentalist Christian virtues and values on the United States. This paper discusses fundamentalist movements since the Scopes trial and assesses their impact on public school education. The NCR holds that traditional God-centered Christianity has been replaced in U.S. society and schools by a humanity-centered secularism, and that this reliance on man instead of God has caused many of our modern ills. NCR has challenged the constitutional separation of church and state and has often won short-term skirmishes. Evolution/creation science controversy, including the Scopes trial of 1925, and the decline and subsequent revival of evolution teaching in the following years is examined. In 1969, California enacted a requirement that creation science and evolution receive equal teaching time. Textbook censorship in West Virginia and Alabama is outlined and calls for schools to come under church control are presented. The use of "secular humanism" by the religious right is examined, as is the "secular humanist conspiracy." Finally, the removal of religion from textbooks and its recent re-emergence as an important topic of public school study is explored. The persistent danger of the New Christian Right is in the fundamentalists' absolutism and their pursuit of long-term goals. Eternal vigilance alone can safeguard that delicate constitutional balance which allows any religion to rise and flourish but not to dominate U.S. society and schools. A 37-item bibliography is included. (GEA)

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Textbook Censorship and Creation Science in Perspective

by Franklin Parker

The New Christian Right (hereafter NCR) has long wanted to impose on the U.S.A. fundamentalist Christian virtues and values. NCR's motives, methods, successes, and failures can best be seen in historical perspective, especially its effects on public schools, anti-evolution teaching since the 1960s, anti-"secular humanism" in the late 1970s and '80s, and "moments of silence" to counter court-prohibited prayer in public schools in the 1980s. The secular humanism charge, used recently to justify censoring textbooks, holds that traditional God-centered Christianity has been replaced in American society and schools by a humanity-centered secularism, and that this reliance on man instead of God has caused many of our modern ills, including rising violence, crime, drug use, abortion, divorce, homosexuality, and abused and discarded children. Financed by millions of dollars raised by TV and radio evangelists and encouraged by the conservative Reagan Administration, the NCR aided by growing rightist organizations, has challenged the constitutional separation of church and state and has often won short-term skirmishes. Some observers fear that if Constitution watchers are not eternally vigilant, the NCR's persistent effort will ultimately win.

Creation Science Laws: Arkansas and Louisiana

NCR anti-evolution activities mounted in 1981, when they introduced in over 40 state legislatures and the U. S. Congress equal time evolution/creation science teaching bills. Arkansas on March 19 and Louisiana on July 21, 1981, passed such bills. Although both equal time laws were declared unconstitutional, it was Federal Judge William R. Overton's January 5, 1982, opinion of unconstitutionality which best

exposed creationist motives and strategy. He said that the cleverly worded equal time bill was a smokescreen for teaching religion in the public schools; that creation "science" was not science, but disguised religion; that "equal time" deliberately exploited Americans sense of fair play; that state-enforced Genesis-based creation teaching was meant to weaken the evolution content of science; and that evolution teaching was deliberately labeled as an aspect of "secular humanist religion," which was blamed for America's ills.

Origins of Fundamentalism

Judge Overton traced the origin of fundamentalist thought to some evangelical Protestant groups' reaction to modernism and change, especially to Charles Darwin's Origin of Species, 1859, which offered evidence that all life evolved gradually over millions of years by natural selection, as better adapted life forms survived and less well adapted ones died out.

Scopes Trial, 1925

Disliking Darwinian evolution for casting doubt on divine creation, fundamentalists were further shocked by late nineteenth-century mainly German Bible scholars' findings that the Bible was written by mortals at different times and places and included myths and possible forgeries.

Most people accepted Darwinian evolution, science, higher Bible criticism, and secular life and government, and still remained religious. Evangelical leaders who believed in Christ's second coming, however, held annual Bible conferences to combat rising secularism. An 1895 Bible conference in Niagara Falls, N.Y., became important because it affirmed and widely distributed five points of Christian doctrine: Bible inerrancy and Christ's divinity, virgin birth, absolution for man's sins, resurrection, and second coming.[1] Wealthy donors enabled this five-point affirmation to be distributed free in millions of pamphlets called The Fundamentals, 1910-1915. These pamphlets largely inspired Prohibition laws and anti-evolution teaching bills in the 1920s. Fundamentalist politician William Jennings Bryan, three-time Democratic candidate for the U.S.A. Presidency, helped introduce 37 anti-evolution bills in 20

states. Tennessee, Arkansas, and three other states passed them. Most legislators felt they had to vote for Tennessee's anti-evolution bill in March 1925 in order to be re-elected.[2] The governor who signed it said, "Nobody believes that it is going to be an active statute."[3]

Scopes Guilty

To aid an American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) test case in Dayton, TN, high school science teacher John Thomas Scopes, 24 and unmarried, agreed to be arrested and tried. In the famous Scopes trial, fundamentalist William Jennings Bryan, who led the state's prosecution, clashed with agnostic Chicago lawyer Clarence Darrow of the ACLU defense. Irritated by the court's anti-evolution bias, Darrow asked for a guilty verdict so that he could appeal to a higher court. Scopes was found guilty and fined. The $100 fine was later revoked on a technicality.

Evolution Teaching Declines

Fundamentalists won the Scopes trial and also won educationally. Publishers, authors, and teachers were frightened. Evolution was downplayed. The textbook Scopes had used, George William Hunter's Civic Biology, in its 1926 revision omitted all mention of evolution. A study of biology textbooks noted:

> Self censorship exercised by the New York-based publishing industry . . . shaped the content of high school biology courses for 35 years following the Scopes trial . . .Publishers and authors feared that a good treatment of evolution meant the loss of the southern market--a fear which seems to have been justified.[4]

Evolution Teaching Restored

Evolution was downplayed in biology textbooks until the USSR launched Sputnik, October 1957, and a frightened Congress funded better math and science textbooks, including the National Science Foundation (NSF) financed new biology (1958). By 1963 the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study had published three widely used biology textbook versions based on evolution.

It was this post-Sputnik reinstatement of evolution in biology textbooks that provoked the rise of creationists and determined their recent drive. Another factor was the 1968 Epperson vs. Arkansas U. S. Supreme Court case which declared Arkansas' old 1929 anti-evolution teaching law unconstitutional. Convinced that the teaching of evolution could not be legally dislodged, creationists hit upon equal time evolution/creation science teaching as a strategy they could win in view of Americans' sense of fair play.[5] The final spur was a partial equal-time victory in California under conservative Governor Ronald Reagan and conservative Superintendent of Instruction Max Rafferty.

Equal Time Creation Science, California

In 1969, creationists had California's science teaching guidelines amended to require equal time for teaching creation science. In 1974 this decision was reversed under Democratic Governor Jerry Brown's less conservative state school board. Partial victory in California, which uses 10 percent of all U. S. textbooks, whetted creationists' appetites. To win California was to win the nation. One author explained:

> What is "good" for California is likely to become "good" for the rest of the nation . . . . Unless publishers are prepared to produce special California editions--and they probably are not--the standard set for California will . . . become the standard for many other states.[6]

Creationists were also encouraged when fundamentalists largely won a 1974-75 campaign around Charleston, WV, against alleged dirty textbooks.[7] More encouragement came when Congress delayed NSF's 1975 funding because fundamentalists objected to an NSF-financed sixth-grade social studies course, "Man: A Course of Study" (MACOS). Fundamentalists criticized MACOS, a much praised multi-media course, for mentioning in its Eskimo unit such Eskimo customs in a harsh environment as wife-swapping, incest, cannibalism, and robbery.[8]

West Virginia Textbook Censorship, 1974-75

Above all, creationists emerged, as have textbook watchers, the Heritage Foundation, the Moral Majority, and other rightist organizations, in reaction to the

troubles of our time. A writer on the 1974-75 Kanawha County, West Virginia, textbook controversy expressed it as follows:

> This county is experiencing a religious crusade as fierce as any out of the Middle Ages . . . . Our children are being sacrificed because of the fanatical zeal of our fundamentalist brothers who claim to be hearing the voice of God. People are confused and angry about everything from marijuana to Watergate. Feeling helpless and left out, they are looking for a scapegoat, eager to exercise all that is evil and foul, cleanse or burn all that is strange and foreign. In this religious war, spiced with overtones of race and class, the books are an accessible target.[9]

Substitute "evolution" for "the books" and one begins to see why the evolution/creation science controversy raged at a time of rapid changes. One can see why a conservative surge with simple religious answers to complex moral problems might have appeal.

Secular Humanism and Textbook Censorship

Textbooks imbued with "secular humanism" were a prime reason given by two fundamentalist-minded federal district judges for censoring textbooks in Hawkins County, TN, October 24, 1986, and in Mobile, AL, March 4, 1987. Alabama's Judge W. Brevard Hand censored 44 textbooks because he said, they advocated a humanistic "religion" and omitted Christian religious aspects of American life. He added: "For purposes of the First Amendment, secular humanism is a religious belief system" Fundamentalists were jubilant: "This is exactly what we were asking for." "Humanism is out of the closet for the first time," said the executive secretary of Pat Robertson's National Legal Fund.[10]

John H. Buchanan, chairman of People for the American Way (PAW), a civil liberties organization which monitors censorship, said Judge Hand's ruling was "judicial bookburning and nothing less." Buchanan explained, "Secular humanism is really a straw man created by religious right leaders like Pat Robertson."[11]

Alabama Textbook Censorship, 1987

Alabama's textbook censorship grew out of the state's earlier adoption of silent prayer in schools. When the law was challenged, as he knew it would be, Judge Hand said that if silent prayer was reversed by a higher court (as it was), he would reopen the case by supporting fundamentalists' charge that secular humanism was being taught as a religion in public schools. He wrote:

> If this court is compelled to purge 'God is great, God is good, we thank Him for our daily food' from the classroom, then this court must also purge from the classroom those things that serve to teach that salvation is through one's self rather than through a deity.[12]

Evangelist Pat Robertson told why winning in Alabama was important:

> In a lawsuit that was a continuation of the Alabama prayer case . . .we said, 'You are teaching humanism in the schools of Alabama,' and we sued the governor and we sued the school board . . . Alabama is a landmark move for religious freedom for Christian people and we are going to see that followed up in state after state.

PAW saw the danger of censorship in Alabama as:

> . . . the most ambitious example to date of Far Right's effort to censor textbooks and inject sectarian beliefs into public school curriculum . . . . Tennessee and Alabama reflect national efforts by Far Right organizations to reshape public education.[13]

Private Religious Schools Replace Public Schools?

Said leading religious right lawyer Michael Farris: "We may even see alternatives to public schools constitutionally mandated," meaning that religious schools might some day soon be state and federally recognized as equal with and eventual replacements for public schools. Echoed Moral Majority founder Jerry Falwell:

> I hope in the next ten years . . . we will have more Christian day schools than . . . public schools. I hope I live to see the day when, as in the early days of our country, we don't have any public schools. The churches will have taken them over again and Christians will be running them. What a happy day that will be![14]

What Secular Humanism Means to the Religious Right

"Secular humanism" as a pejorative term was used significantly in a 1982 fundamentalist crusade against sex education in a Corvallis, Oregon, high school. A fundamentalist parent complained that the high school sex education course was a "how-to class instead of a not-to class." She saw a fundamentalist church film that warned against an anti-religion known as "secular humanism." Investigating further, she was sent material describing "secular humanism" by fundamentalist textbook critics Mel and Norma Gabler of Longview, Texas. Secular humanism, they wrote, was:

> Faith in man instead of faith in God . . . . It [promotes] situation ethics; evolution; sexual freedom, including sex education courses; and internationalism . . . . 'Humanism' centers on 'self' because it recognizes no higher being to which man is responsible. Thus there is much emphasis in public education on each child having a 'positive self concept.' . . . this eliminates coming to Christ for forgiveness of sin. It eliminates the Christian attributes of meekness and humility.[15]

A Moral Majority source describes secular humanism as:

> Placing the created at the center of all things rather than the creator. From such a presupposition flow inevitable moral and ethical consequences that . . . have proved detrimental to the best interests of the human race.[16]

Fundamentalist Tim LaHaye in his book, Battle for the Mind, says that 275,000 committed humanists have infiltrated and taken control of the U. S. Government, the courts, the media, the schools, and countless national organizations. He wrote:

> We are being controlled by a small but very influential cadre of committed humanists who are determined to turn traditionally moral-minded America into an amoral, humanist country. Oh, they don't call it humanism. They label it *democracy*, but they mean humanism in all its atheistic, amoral depravity.[17]

Secular Humanist "Conspiracy"

Fundamentalists see a humanist conspiracy in 1933 and 1973 statements published by the American Humanist Association, describing the possibilities of human achievement. It was signed by nontheist intellectuals John Dewey, B. F. Skinner, Sidney Hook, Isaac Asimov, and others. Fundamentalists also cite a 1961 Supreme Court case footnote reference to an actual California church called "Secular Humanist," which with Buddhism and other religions does not subscribe to an actual God. On the basis of this passing reference, fundamentalists spin a conspiracy theory claiming that the U. S. Supreme Court has declared secular humanism to be the official religion of the United States, in violation of the First Amendment.[18]

Why "Secular Humanism" Was Used

An Atlanta Constitution editorial stated that Judge Hand imbued secular humanism with legal respectability:

> Spearheaded by the National Legal Fund . . ., the Alabama textbook controversy was born . . . . Worst of all, [Judge Hand] has offered temporary encouragement to litigious bookbanning from coast to coast. Their cases ultimately will fail. But until they do, the shadow of legal activity will harass and intimidate countless local school boards.[19]

Publishers Remove Religion from Textbooks

Charging secular humanism as an evil influence on textbook content furthered fundamentalist censorship efforts. Another fundamentalist argument, one with which opponents agreed, was that textbook publishers ignored religion. Said Judge T. G. Hull in censoring Hawkins County, TN, textbooks:

> They've almost whitewashed religion out of the schools. They've done it to try to satisfy everybody. They would write anything as long as they could sell it.[20]

Others agree that textbook publishers, wanting to sell textbooks and fearful of offending critics, have been intimidated to remove religion from textbooks.

"The removal of religion as a subject of study," wrote a rabbi and a Lutheran minister, "has dismayed many responsible educators, parents, and mainstream religious leaders."[21] Martin Luther King, Jr.'s civil rights activities are described in books but often omitted is the fact that he was a Baptist minister. A sixth grade social studies book on Joan of Arc was criticized for not mentioning God as inspiring her actions.

Laidlaw Educational Publishers president admitted, "There has not been an appropriate amount of time spent on the role of religion in society."[22]

An Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) report called for an end to "the curricular silence on religion," adding that public schools must get over the mistaken notion "that matters of religion are simply too hot to handle."[23]

California Restores Religion in Textbooks

Recent studies citing lack of religious content in textbooks alerted the education community to the fact that fundamentalist attacks had originally frightened publishers and that it was time to restore religious content.[24] The California Board of Education on July 10, 1987, took this initiative, requiring history textbooks to include more facts on religion. California's large textbook market sways the publishing industry, and its decisions have national implications.[25]

Restoring religious content in textbooks only partially satisfied fundamentalists. For a time they felt they might become a dominant force in American society. They had won short-term successes in equal time evolution/creation science teaching and in textbook censorship; had raised some questions about the danger of secular humanistic thought; and their debate about the lack of religion in textbooks had unintentionally restored religion and better literature in textbooks. Then came their disarray over the Jim and Tammy Bakker scandal in 1987, the Jimmy Swaggart

scandal in 1988, and the promising but disappointing delegate vote gained by Presidential candidate Pat Robertson.

Eternal Vigilance, the Price of Liberty

The danger is in the fundamentalists' absolutism and their persistent pursuit of long-term goals. When the U. S. Supreme Court declared Louisiana's equal time creation science law unconstitutional (June 19, 1987), fundamentalist lawyer Wendell R. Bird believed reversal possible. "With four justices approaching age 80," he said, "The court won't stay the same forever."[26]

Biology Professor Stephen J. Gould, who called creation science "a ruse and sham," warned that "the larger struggle is not over and never will be."[27] Eternal vigilance alone can safeguard that delicate constitutional balance which allows any religion to rise and flourish but none to dominate American society and schools.

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